

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A method of maintaining or enhancing the healthy functioning of the skin and coat system of a pet in need of same comprising the step of feeding the pet a food composition comprising a nutritional agent which promotes the growth of bifido- and lactic-bacteria in the gastro-intestinal tract of the pet.

Claim 2 (original): A method according to claim 1 in which the nutritional agent is selected from the group of prebiotics and probiotic micro-organisms.

Claim 3 (original): A method according to claim 2 wherein the food composition includes both a prebiotic and a probiotic micro-organism.

Claim 4 (previously presented): A method according to claim 2 in which the prebiotic is selected from the group of inulin, fructooligosaccharides and plant materials which contain inulin and/or fructooligosaccharides.

Claim 5 (previously presented): A method according to claim 1 in which the pet food further comprises a long chain fatty acid.

Claim 6 (currently amended): A method for improving or maintaining the coat of a pet in need of same, the method comprising administering to the pet a nutritional agent which promotes the growth of bifido- and lactic-bacteria in the gastro-intestinal tract of the pet.

Claim 7 (canceled):

Claim 8 (original): A method according to claim 6 in which the nutritional agent is administered as a supplement to the pet's normal diet.

Claim 9 (previously presented): A method according to claim 6 in which the nutritional agent is selected from the group of prebiotics and probiotic micro-organisms.

Claim 10 (original): A method according to claim 9 in which the prebiotic is selected from the group of inulin, fructooligosaccharides and plant materials which contain inulin and/or fructooligosaccharides.

Claim 11 (previously presented): A method according to claim 6 in which the pet food further comprises a long chain fatty acid.

Claim 12 (previously presented): A method according to claim 6 in which the pet food further comprises a zinc source.

Claim 13 (currently amended): A method for improving or maintaining the coat of a pet in need of same, the method comprising administering to the pet a nutritionally complete pet food which contains a nutritional agent which promotes the growth of bifido- and lactic-bacteria in the gastro-intestinal tract of the pet.

Claim 14 (original): A method according to claim 13 in which the nutritional agent is selected from the group of prebiotics and probiotic micro-organisms.

Claim 15 (original): A method according to claim 14 in which the prebiotic is selected from the group of inulin, fructooligosaccharides and plant materials which contain inulin and/or fructooligosaccharides.

Claim 16 (previously presented): A method according to claim 13 in which the pet food contains about 0.1% to about 5% by weight of a prebiotic fiber as the nutritional agent.

Claim 17 (previously presented): A method according to claim 13 in which the pet food contains about 10^4 to about 10^{11} cells of a probiotic micro-organism per gram of the pet food as the nutritional agent.

Claim 18 (previously presented): A method according to claim 13 in which the pet food further comprises a long chain fatty acid.

Claim 19 (previously presented): A method according to claim 13 in which the pet food further comprises a zinc source.

Claim 20 (currently amended): A method for improving or maintaining the skin and coat system of a pet in need of same, the method comprising administering to the pet a nutritional agent which increases the digestion of nutrients in the gastro-intestinal tract of the pet.

Claim 21 (currently amended): A method for improving or maintaining the skin and coat system of a pet in need of same, the method comprising administering to the pet a nutritional agent which improves the microflora balance on the skin of the pet.

Claim 22 (currently amended): A method for improving or maintaining shininess and softness of the coat of a pet in need of same, the method comprising administering to the pet a nutritional agent which promotes the growth of bifido- and lactic-bacteria in the gastrointestinal tract of the pet.

Claim 23 (currently amended): A method for improving or maintaining shininess and softness of the coat of a pet in need of same, the method comprising administering to the pet a nutritional agent which increases the digestion of nutrients in the gastro-intestinal tract of the pet.

Claim 24 (currently amended): A method of reducing or assisting in the prophylaxis of dandruff in the coat of a pet in need of same, the method comprising administering to the pet a

nutritional agent which promotes the growth of bifido- and lactic-bacteria in the gastro-intestinal tract of the pet.

Claim 25 (previously presented): A method according to claim 20 wherein the nutritional agent is selected from the group of prebiotics and probiotic micro-organisms.

Claim 26 (original): A method according to claim 25 wherein the nutritional agent further comprises a fatty acid.

Claim 27 (currently amended): A method for improving or maintaining the coat of a pet in need of same, the method comprising administering to the pet a nutritionally complete pet food which contains a long chain fatty acid and a prebiotic selected from the group of inulin, fructooligosaccharides and plant materials which contain inulin and/or fructooligosaccharides.

Claim 28 (currently amended): A method of improving or maintaining the coat health of a pet in need of same, comprising the step of administering to the pet a prebiotic fiber.

Claim 29 (currently amended): A method according to claim 28 wherein the prebiotic is obtained from a [[5]] plant source.

Claim 30 (previously presented): A method of manufacturing a pet food, the method comprising providing a prebiotic substance or a probiotic micro-organism in a pet food composition for giving the coat of a pet animal eating it a flourishing appearance.

Claim 31 (currently amended): A method of reducing dandruff in a coat of a pet animal in need of same, the method comprising providing a prebiotic substance in a pet food composition and administering the pet food composition to the a pet animal.

Claim 32 (previously presented): A method according to claim 30 wherein the composition includes hickory.

Claim 33 (previously presented): A method according to claim 32 wherein the composition further includes soybean oil.